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Epidaurus Project Symposium on Healing Design

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Presentation Abstract

Creating Restorative Environments: Collaboration in the Garden

Nature has significant therapeutic qualities. Its richness, wonder and ever-changing complexity engages our senses and provides us with the means to restore and maintain a positive sense of self. Carefully designed gardens and other outdoor spaces can be used to enhance nature's inherent restorative qualities.

In a healthcare setting, restorative gardens are an effective way to address the sense of struggle, isolation and vulnerability experienced in terms of illness and crisis. These gardens aid not only those undergoing treatment, but their caregivers as well — by providing a restful retreat and contact with Nature as an ally against burnout. Our objective is to create a supportive setting that reduces stress and fosters a sense of well-being, empowerment, dignity and promise.

When designers turn their attention to healthcare settings and “special needs” populations there is a temptation to focus on particular, often restrictive aspects of the project rather than explore the expanse of rich experiences and possibilities. When we design accessible spaces we are designing not just for the disabled, we are designing for everyone. It is in this context of creating a garden that accommodates the full range of the human condition where we find our presentation case study, the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden in the Cleveland Botanical Garden.

The design goals for the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden are:

1. To reinforce respect for those who would use the garden
2. To provide comfort, accessibility and beauty as equally important elements
3. To provide a setting that is engaging and enriching for all who visit the garden

The design goals were achieved through a collaborative process among the designers, horticultural therapists, administration, operations staff and donors. Collaboration enhanced the design process by providing inputs that are not within the realm or scope of the individual practitioners. The dialogue helped identify the priorities of the user group and brought the design elements implemented closer to the user's requirements.

Presentation Abstract (*continued*)

This presentation will begin with an overview of restorative environments that range in scale, context and complexity and will then feature a collaborative approach to incorporating nature, healing and design in the development of the Elizabeth and Nona Evans Restorative Garden. The project encompasses the renovation and expansion of a treasured Library Reading Garden into an exemplary setting that expresses the restorative powers of nature. Using this project as a case study, the presentation will emphasize:

- Incorporating a team approach to the planning and design process, including designers, horticultural therapists, administration, operations staff and donors to create a responsive, flexible and cost-effective garden.
- Design considerations responsive to individual physical and emotional needs, site considerations, funding strategies and health/safety issues.
- Program considerations such as wellness policies, education classes centered around desired themes or use, etc. taking full advantage of the limited space and the abundance of plant material.

Through thoughtful design, construction and planning, restorative environments can create a supportive environment that helps make people healthful, whole and well again.

Attachment: Dirtworks-ASLA 2006 Professional Awards.pdf.
Also available online at <http://www.asla.org/awards/2006/06winners/294.html>